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**New Hampshire**  
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## Pumpkin Time

By Gail McWilliam Jellie, Director  
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*Did you know that:*

Pumpkins range in size from less than one pound to over 1000 pounds?

Pumpkins are a fruit?

In colonial times, pumpkins were used as an ingredient for the pie crust, not the filling?

Pumpkin seeds can be roasted as a snack?

Pumpkin flowers are edible?

The perennial fall favorite, the pumpkin, has a long and illustrious history. Believed to have originated in Central America, seeds from related plants have been found in Mexico dating back to 5500 B.C. Pumpkins are members of the cucurbita family along with cucumbers and squash. They grow on creeping vines.

Native American Indians included pumpkins as a mainstay in their diets. They roasted strips of pumpkin and ate them. Pumpkin seeds were used for food and medicine. Dried pumpkin strips were even used to make woven mats. When settlers arrived, they saw pumpkins grown by Indians and pumpkins soon became a staple in their diets, too, used in stews, soups and desserts. Pumpkins were at the first Thanksgiving dinner. Colonists made pumpkin pie by filling a hollowed out pumpkin shell with milk, honey and spices and baking it.

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Pumpkins have had a Halloween connection for centuries. Pumpkin jack-o-lanterns evolved from an Irish myth about a rather unpleasant man nicknamed "Stingy Jack". As the story goes, Stingy Jack tricked the Devil into promising that when Jack died, he would not take his soul. When Jack eventually did die, he was turned away from Heaven because of his unsavory past. Keeping his promise, the devil also denied him from Hell. Jack was forced to roam in darkness between Heaven and Hell with only a burning coal to light his way. He put the coal into a carved out turnip and has been roaming the earth with it ever since.

In Ireland, people began making their own versions of Jack's lantern by carving scary faces into turnips or potatoes and placing them by the window or door to keep Stingy Jack and other evil spirits away. Irish immigrants brought their jack-o-lantern traditions to America and discovered that pumpkins made the perfect lantern.

Today, pumpkins are popular garden items, becoming a specialty for many growers. Annual pumpkin weigh-off contests draw dedicated growers who have nursed giant pumpkins along to eye-popping weights. Pumpkins provide food, decorations and holiday traditions. For more fun pumpkin information, visit the NH Giant Pumpkin Growers Association at <http://nhgpga.org/index.htm>.

For more information about where to find New Hampshire pumpkins or fall pumpkin/harvest activities contact the Division of Agricultural Development, NH Dept. of Agriculture, Markets & Food, PO Box 2042, Concord, NH 03302-2042, tel. 271-3788, email [gmcwilliam@agr.state.nh.us](mailto:gmcwilliam@agr.state.nh.us). Or visit [www.agriculture.nh.gov](http://www.agriculture.nh.gov) and click on publications.